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ABSTRACT

School-business partnerships can be a valuable supplement to the public education system, especially in an era of limited resources. The business and industrial community can provide support for schools in a number of ways, including awards to students and teachers, scholarships, equipment loans, on-the-job training, curriculum revision, part-time employment, and direct participation in instruction. To establish such a partnership, principals and business people should take the following steps: (1) clarify their own and each other's expectations; (2) identify firms with desired expertise; (3) hold a well-planned meeting or luncheon for firm representatives, faculty, parents, and students; (4) establish a time-line with desired outcomes and specific activities; (5) appoint a project coordinator; and (6) agree on a method of evaluation. Examples are provided of six successful partnership programs, along with suggestions for additional resources (such as senior citizens and small business people). The program should optimally provide learning opportunities for all students, both college-bound and non-college-bound. (TE)

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School-Business Partnerships: Why Not?

Laying the Foundation for Successful Programs

Santee C. Ruffin, Jr.

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SCHOOL-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS: WHY NOT?

Laying the Foundation for Successful Programs

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Reston, Virginia

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INTRODUCTION

A great deal has already been written about schools and businesses working together to enhance educational programs, prevent dropouts, and retrain the unemployed. However, little has been written directly for secondary school principals.

Today, when school districts are asked what they are doing that is new, some form of an adopt-a-school program is usually mentioned. Districts that do not mention such a program are asked, "Why not?"

This monograph reviews the basic concepts of school-business partnerships. We hope that it motivates secondary school administrators who have been reluctant to investigate the possibilities of such a partnership to take the first step. Even when an organized program is not feasible for a particular school, administrators and staff members should be aware of the volunteer support system that exists outside the school building.

Efforts such as those of the McDonald Corporation in 1980, when more than 3,000 McDonald's teenage employees, parents, and school guidance counselors from the District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia participated in a computerized career and educational counseling program, cannot be ignored. The program, called PACE (Programmed Assistance in Career Exploration), included six facets: Exploring Careers, Career Descriptions, Military Job Descriptions, Exploring Colleges, Exploring Vocational and Technical Schools, and Exploring Financial Aid. Participants filled out an inventory analysis and sent it to a designated computer center. Within two weeks they received a printout tailored to meet their individual needs by describing the nature of the job, the skills required, general pay scales, and employment prospects for the next several years.

Why did McDonald's conduct such an enormous project? No doubt, there were some public relations considerations. However, the firm was willing to go on record as recognizing that most of the jobs its employees held had a very limited future. It wanted its employees to set bigger and better goals.

As one corporation spokesperson explained: "Obviously, our educational system, good as it is, cannot provide youth with all of the help they need in career planning. Both the private sector and parents must join forces with education in a community collaborative effort. McDonald Corporation is eager to become one of the private sector's contributors to this effort."

Other firms — such as Shell Oil Company, American Telephone and Telegraph, International Business Machines Corporation, and General Motors — have advised and continue to maintain the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. We should also recognize the efforts of such businesses as Northrop Aircraft and Security Pacific Bank in Los Angeles; Bell of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Electric Company, and Girard Bank in Philadelphia; Ralston Purina, Monsanto, and Standard Oil in St. Louis; Chase Manhattan Bank, Dun and Bradstreet, and the New York Stock Exchange in New York; and Texaco, Exxon, and International Business Machines in Houston.

School-business partnerships are a valuable part of the education system. This monograph should help you to lay the groundwork for establishing such a program.

SCHOOL-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Quality education is a major national concern. Criticisms and suggestions are coming from all directions. Through all of the debate about the direction in which education should proceed, however, there seems to be a consensus regarding the need for strong school-business partnerships.

Working relationships between individual schools and the business/industrial community have existed in some fashion for many years. These relationships include scholarships for graduating seniors, work experience programs, summer youth employment, job fairs, etc. However, this approach to augmenting the educational experiences of students is now national in scope and is viewed by educators and business people as essential.

The tremendous potential that solid partnerships between schools and businesses represent dictates the need for a systematic approach to their development. When considering developing a school-business partnership, the principal must be aware of a number of factors:

- Expectations of Schools
- Staff Involvement and Support
- Expectations of Businesses
- Steps to Building the Partnership
- Successful Programs in Operation.

These factors warrant further investigation.

EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOLS

In the past, some educators have been reluctant to involve business and industry in instructional programs for a number of reasons: a belief that business persons would not understand how schools function; a fear of negative criticism; a belief that

business and industry would target their interests solely to vocational education; and a fear that business would encroach on the professional image of educators.

However, an increasing number of educators have come to recognize the role that business and industry can play in augmenting the learning experiences of all students. The Institute for Educational Leadership states in *Let's Not Reinvent the Wheel* that "schools are realizing that the search for relevance, the battle cry of the sixties, has resulted in its opposite — isolation from society and the work place. . . . . In a time of fiscal stringency and widespread criticism, schools are in search of allies. Educators more and more realize that business could be a source of strong civic support for public education, increasingly hamstrung by the taxpayer revolt, public dismay at the quality of education, and declining enrollments in a fragile economy that limits the resources schools need to do their job. Business can be a source of moral and political support, financial support, and ideas for improving education."

The business community can provide support in a number of ways:

- Awards to students for outstanding achievement
- Awards to teachers for exemplary efforts
- Scholarships
- Equipment loans
- On-the-job training experiences for students and staff
- Participation in curriculum revision
- Part-time employment opportunities for students
- Direct participation in the instructional program.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

Early staff involvement in the development of new programs increases the chances of positive response and promotes a sense of ownership. Therefore, staff members must be directly involved in establishing a school-business partnership. The needs of the principal and staff must be determined and a willingness to participate and cooperate on an individual and collective basis must be expressed.

Teachers must also feel that volunteers in their classrooms do not pose threats or jeopardize their status. For example, because

a reporter from a local newspaper discusses writing styles with students does not mean that the teacher is not capable of teaching writing. The experience should be viewed by students and teachers alike as an enrichment tool.

EXPECTATIONS OF BUSINESSES

Business people expect high school graduates to be adequately prepared to enter the complex world of work; to have a broader perspective than yesterday's graduates. Today's world is more complex, citizens are more mobile, towns and cities contain a large number of persons whose basic language is not English, and there are fewer menial labor jobs available.

Let's Not Reinvent the Wheel suggests, "As taxpayers and citizens, business leaders want to see schools run in a business-like manner. This does not necessarily mean adopting business practices wholesale. But it does mean accountability in the educational sector for the resources provided and used." The key difference between the attitudes of business people today and those of the past few decades seems to be a willingness to do more than criticize. They are now offering to share the talents of their staff members in technical areas as well as the basic skills.

STEPS TO BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP

Step I

Educators should know exactly what business people are looking for. Likewise, business people should know what they can expect from the partnership.

Certain questions must be answered by school staff members:

- *What are the weakest areas in our total education program?* This suggests that a total assessment should be made of all subjects taught in the school. An accurate assessment would pinpoint the areas that need support and would allow the staff to set priorities.

- *Can we strengthen these areas on our own through curriculum revision, budget modification, reassignment of personnel, etc.?*

While one of the purposes of school-business partnerships is to supplement existing programs, it makes sense to use outside talents and funding to strengthen areas that cannot be accommodated through normal school channels.

- *If we ask the business community to assist us, what do we want them to do?*

It would be devastating to recruit a group of willing volunteers from business and industry and find that their specific tasks have not been identified. Rather, secure the commitment from business and delay implementation until both groups have had an opportunity to study the school program and compile a mutually-acceptable list of responsibilities.

- *Will we be able to measure the difference these people made in our program, or are we really involved in a public relations program?*

All of the services and interaction resulting from the partnership should be evaluated. This kind of measurement would determine how close both groups came to achieving the stated goals and objectives and whether a program is worthy of being repeated during the next school year. In most cases, the fact that the school and business people are working together stimulates an increased amount of respect and mutual support. The obvious spin-off is a positive and mutual public relations component for both groups.

A business that is considering participating in a school-business partnership should ask itself:

- Do we have the personnel to meet the needs of the school?
- Can we spare these persons on a regular basis?
- Are the partnership goals and objectives clear?
- Have the school staff members been prepared for our involvement?
- Have we scheduled periodic evaluations of our efforts so that we may make adjustments and/or determine if we should continue the partnership?

The approach to the partnership should be realistic. The business must first determine what its degree of involvement should be. Some schools are happy to receive periodic grants. In some cases work experience for students would more than fit the

bill. Others have a need for the expertise that exists within the firm.

Consistency of involvement is important. Classes that are scheduled to have instructional program support from businesses are successful to the degree of consistent and punctual participation on the part of the individual(s) involved. A class that has only one certified teacher who teaches every day will fare better than one that is subjected to hit-or-miss supplemental participation from outside the school.

Needless to say, the firms' expectations of partnership benefits should be clear to everyone involved. Both groups must become familiar with one another's philosophy, policies, personnel, strengths, and weaknesses prior to implementing a program. This is essential to promote understanding and increase the level of trust.

Step II

School personnel should identify firms that are capable of providing the desired expertise. It is hoped that the most compatible firm(s) can be found among those who have already expressed an interest in working with schools. If the desired type of business is not readily available, it is time to recruit.

School-business relationships, until recently, have been strained. Therefore, in some communities it is still necessary for both groups to put past attitudes aside. School administrators should make fence-mending and recruitment visits to local business and industrial establishments.

Step III

Schedule a meeting with representatives of the firms you would like to have involved, faculty, parents, and students. This meeting should be held in the school building and, if funds permit, it could be preceded by a luncheon. A setting of this type tends to put most people at ease and promotes understanding.

Planning is essential. Every detail should be checked, then re-checked, including: name tags, table assignments that ensure a mixing of the representatives, meat and non-meat dishes, and an adequate amount of food for those assembled. A school should present an image of good taste without extravagance.

Do not, however, lose sight of the purpose of the meeting. The people you have called together have busy schedules, so plan an agenda. The key function of the meeting is discussion of the need and desire for a school-business partnership. Put this rationale in writing and distribute copies to all attendees prior to the beginning of the meeting.

A school should present a package that anticipates the concerns of the business community, and provides an outline that suggests a number of roles for business people. The discussion of this project should be directed toward those firms that have previously volunteered to serve in some manner. Their suggestions and public expression of cooperation should help to promote a spirit of enthusiasm and encourage the uncommitted to participate. Uncommitted business representatives should not be made to feel conspicuous. Perhaps they do not have the authority to agree to participate, or want more time to determine their response.

Step IV

Establish a program timeline. Now you can develop a program that expresses desired outcomes, pinpoints personnel involved (students and staff members), and establishes specific dates for specific activities to be conducted.

Step V

If only one firm has agreed to become involved in the school-business partnership, a project coordinator must be identified and his or her role defined. This person will be responsible for keeping the lines of communication open, following through on projects, solving logistical and staffing problems, and most importantly, making sure the program is functioning in concert with the stated goals and objectives.

Step VI

School and business partners should agree on a method of evaluating specific activities as well as the overall program. This is a positive function that will identify strengths and weaknesses and will assist those involved in determining the future of the joint effort. Such an evaluation might even result in more funds and business personnel for the school.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS IN OPERATION

The most common label given school-business partnerships today is the adopt-a-school program. Despite the rather general name, however, programs function in a variety of ways.

Chicago, Illinois

The Chicago public school system is involved in one of the largest school-business partnership programs in the nation. As of July 1982, 73 agencies had developed 112 partnerships with 86 schools. Participants include a nationally known life insurance company, publisher, airline, and department store. In addition, several national and state service agencies are involved. This effort is augmented by the participation of several local universities and business associations.

The activities conducted include work-study programs for students, training sessions at the business sites, computer purchases for schools, and instruction in basic skills by business people.

One high school has been adopted by an advertising agency. After working with tenth grade students for five months on the functions of an advertising agency, the agency divided the students into teams. Each team functioned as an advertising agency and performed such activities as marketing surveys, needs analyses, promotion campaigns, and media analyses. These teams made competitive presentations before a panel of advertising executives.

Comments about the program include:

- "Using the adopt-a-school idea, the city's business sector is pitching in to help solve problems in the public schools."
- "Just having someone from the outside come in and look at their operations and ask questions has helped the school."
- "Adopt-a-school offers Chicago business a first-hand look at the schools."

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The School District of Philadelphia, like a large number of other districts, has had a relationship with business and industry through its work-study and distributive education programs. The annual city-wide distributive education banquet, which

culminates the year's activities, includes hundreds of students, their teachers, employment supervisors, and upper management representatives. One need only see the joy on the faces of business people when one of their interns receives an award to know that strong school-business partnerships are realities.

As early as 1967 one of Philadelphia's major banks, with the assistance of the school district's business education department, selected five students each from five different high schools to participate in an experimental program. These 25 students, who were neither the best nor the worst academically, were exposed to a number of varying responsibilities in the bank. They each worked with an employee for three hours a day, Monday through Thursday. On Friday, they met as a group with the bank staff person responsible for monitoring their activities to discuss their successes and problems. Officers of the bank also answered any questions about the functions of various departments. The program was so successful that another bank and an insurance company initiated similar programs the following year. Programs of this type continue to operate in Philadelphia.

Currently, at least two high school academies are in operation in Philadelphia. Their staffs, composed of teachers and business personnel, determine the curriculum, which stresses the academic and vocational skills that students need to become productive employees. Strong emphasis is placed on the interpersonal and job-seeking skills needed to compete successfully in the workplace.

In the electric academy, for example, the students contract with businesses for product sales. They learn to determine time, material, tools, and delivery costs.

Indianapolis, Indiana

More than 2,000 elementary and high school students have participated in Indianapolis' Partners in Education program. Through the efforts of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and approximately 500 businesses, these students and teachers have increased their career awareness and have acquired a better understanding of the requirements of the business world. In addition, business has developed a better understanding of the schools.

This partnership offers students exposure to careers in banking

and a chance to improve their interviewing, business letter writing, and journalism skills. Some students also participate in traditional work experience programs.

Los Angeles, California

Approximately 200 employees of a major bank volunteer their time to teach high school students a wide variety of banking jobs. The Skills Training Education Program (STEP) offers about 100 classes, ranging in length from 70 to 180 hours per semester, to 2,000 students per year. Some of the classes are composed of adults; however, the program is primarily for high school seniors.

Oakland, California

Local colleges and representatives of the "Silicon Valley" firms are helping teachers and students prepare for the high technology jobs that are indigenous to this area. In addition to emphasizing knowledge of the job market and problem-solving skills, the program provid[illegible] work experience for students.

A planning group composed of representatives of business, higher education, and the school district determines curriculum revisions, teacher inservice activities, and future directions for the program.

Memphis, Tennessee

In 1979, Memphis initiated an Adopt-a-School program. The efforts of representatives of two women's organizations resulted in adoption of 50 schools during the first year.

The program is essentially "a people rather than a money program," according to Memphis school officials. However, it was also noted that "once an adopter falls in love with its adopted school, often monetary assistance is provided."

Schools and "adopters" are matched according to the needs of the schools and services that can be provided by the adopters. One company provides 120 volunteers to work with 60 development clubs. Another firm offers 35 tutors four days per week to tutor in the areas of high school level reading, math, and science.

WORDS OF CAUTION

■ *Don't Forget the Individual Volunteer*

In a rush to get on the school-business partnership or adopt-a-school bandwagon, we run the risk of forgetting those persons who have been with us for many years — the individual volunteers. Senior citizens are anxious to help and want to feel needed. The small business person and the retired industrialist can make valuable contributions to a school and/or a school system.

Many school districts have departments whose primary function is to coordinate the efforts of volunteers. For more information, contact the National School Volunteer Program, 701 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 302, Arlington, Va. 22314.

■ *Consider the Needs of All Students*

While most partnerships address the needs of marginal students, it would be short-sighted not to think of the needs of average and above-average students. Business and industry representatives have expressed concern about the academic abilities of high school students regardless of their desired field of endeavor. Therefore, it behooves school administrators to attempt to enrich the learning experiences of all students.

CONCLUSION

Interest in school-business partnerships continues to grow because an increasing number of principals recognize the need to involve business people in the educational experiences of their students and because reductions-in-force and shrinking funds are forcing administrators to find new and better ways to provide first-class learning experiences for all students.

School-business partnerships represent valuable components of the educational enterprise. By providing work experience opportunities, loaning personnel, updating teachers, granting funds, and actively supporting public schools, the business and industrial communities make contributions that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Schools and businesses working together to produce better students and better employees, is a welcome concept.

Quality, not quantity, should be a basic policy for every partnership. The principal must be able to answer the question, "How is this program enriching the education of the students involved?"

The program should provide learning opportunities for both non-college-bound and college-bound students. There is often greater need to assist impoverished students and students who have learning disabilities. However, whenever possible, a partnership should attempt to meet the needs of all students.

No matter how beautiful the school-business partnership plan might sound, it will not work unless the administrator exhibits enthusiasm and the staff feels a sense of ownership in the project. The success of a school's program is directly related to the degree of staff cooperation.

While a principal should expect to receive advice and criticism from the business partner, he or she has by no means relinquished any authority or responsibility. Business involvement in a school should be viewed as another tool to help teachers provide the best education possible for students.

Schools working with businesses and individual volunteers to

better prepare our students represent investments that never stop paying dividends. Our dividends will appear in the form of a more literate society, better prepared employees, and an America that is proud of its schools.

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13